

## Benefits of On Site Educational Field Trips

Wilson's Creek offers a variety of personal interpretive services, including walks, talks, living history programs, and other general public activities. Our education programs are fundamentally different from these activities. However, education programs offer benefits that traditional programs do not.

Student education programs involve three components: the park, the schools, and the students. The time, effort, and money put into such programs are well spent. No other type of interpretation can offer both immediate and long term results as directly as an education program. By developing and presenting education programs, we make an indisputable contribution toward the future of the participants and the resource.

### Benefits to the Park

***Stewardship*** Education programs reach children when they are still forming their opinions, values, and ethics. This is a prime opportunity for a park to help instill the feelings of ownership and belonging that mean long-term support for the park. Children who grow up with a sense of stewardship are less likely to cause vandalism (people don't vandalize their own property), and as adults are more likely to support park programs and policies through visitation, participation, and the ballot box.

***Reaches adults through children*** Students who have a positive educational experience in a park will take that news home with them. This in turn may lead to future visits by the family and a general increase in community awareness and support for the park. Thus, an adult or family unit that had not previously been a park user becomes a new visitor.

***Develops skills in interpreters*** Interpreters who are trained to present education programs are required to develop skills in teaching and child development that they might otherwise not acquire. These skills are transferable to virtually all other interpretive presentations and programs.

***Learning with peers*** One of the more beneficial aspects of an education program from a teaching standpoint is the ability to have participants of a similar age and/or learning level. This greatly enhances the instructor's opportunity to develop presentations and activities that are geared for the applicable learning level. Ensuring instruction appropriate for the audience significantly improves understanding and retention. This opportunity rarely exists in programs for mixed audiences of the general public.

***Emphasizes the unique nature of the site*** Education programs tie in directly with the park's resources. This presents a clear demonstration of the purpose for which the park was established, and enables the park to interpret its primary resources consistently with its enabling legislation.

***Makes the park an instrumental part of the community*** By reaching into the school an education program helps to emphasize the special characteristics of the park and the adjacent locality. It also demonstrates to the citizenry its recognition of being a significant part of the community.

***Can be used to introduce special emphasis programs or management concerns*** Education programs are an excellent method for the park to introduce special emphasis programs or management concerns. For example, climate change or other special emphasis programs can be incorporated into programs where appropriate.

***Lends legitimacy and credibility of the park to children*** This is an obscure, but important point. Children often see a park as simply a place for fun. Naturally, parks are a place for fun, but they all have some significance for which the site was protected. Through a school education program, children are introduced directly to the underlying purpose of the park.

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## **Benefits To Schools**

While we readily acknowledge that an education program must be of benefit to the park, it is also important that we recognize the value of the program to the schools and teachers.

***Reinforces classroom instruction in a manner not available to the teacher*** Teachers are aware of the fundamental limitations of a classroom setting. Field trips to the park provide a significant contribution to classroom instruction that the teacher is physically unable to provide.

***Presents interpretation in a structure they can understand*** Like it or not, schools exist in a structure and framework all their own, just as any government agency does. And as in any bureaucracy, they understand things best that fit into their system and vocabulary. Education programs are identifiable by schools as the kind of program with which they are comfortable, and which fit into their system's goals and requirements.

***Meshes with school curriculum and the requirements teachers have for making field trips*** Field trips are not projects that schools take on lightly, because of expense and effort. Schools embark on these programs because field trips are considered an important part of the school curriculum. A great deal of work has gone into the planning, justification, and logistics of the field trip before the class arrives. It is our professional responsibility to ensure that both students and teachers have the kind of experience they expect and deserve.

***Programs are reliable, predictable, and dependable*** The National Park Service has a reputation for excellence. Teachers and school administrators recognize our expertise and quality. When a teacher elects to bring a class to a national park site, s/he is making a decision based upon this preconception. This assures the teacher that the time and money put into the field trip will be worthwhile.

***Respects the professionalism of teachers by meshing with their goals and concerns for their students*** Teachers have a large stake in their students. They see them five days a week for

nearly a year. We see them for a few hours. The effort and professionalism we put into our programs is a reflection of the same effort and professionalism that educators put into their teaching. By developing and presenting quality education programs, we are acknowledging to the schools that we care as much for their teachers and students as they do.

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## **Benefits to Students**

Anyone who has witnessed the expressions of pride and accomplishment on the face of a child who has just completed a program, or has fielded the endless barrage of questions from an excited class, can attest to the immediate benefits students derive from an education program. But how does an education program accomplish this kind of result?

**Active learning** Participation in a park education program is an active learning experience. Whether the methods are role playing, problem solving, games, physical activity, or other learning processes, the participants are not passive observers. Applying the old adage of ***“I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand,”*** park education programs offer a learning experience that students will carry with them; this experience can form a basis for future decisions as responsible adults, and help to develop a preservation ethic.

**On the “real” site** Like anyone else, children appreciate the sense of being in the “real” place. It is where the activity discussed actually occurred. This is, of course, the basic reason all parks exist: we preserve and protect sites of cultural and natural significance. This significance can sometimes be missed by the general visiting public. Participants in education programs, however, take full advantage of this unique opportunity.

**Reinforces classroom material** Visits to parks are usually tied in with classroom curricula on the same or related subjects. By visiting the site, students receive a direct contact with the resource which can reinforce or complement the classroom material. Furthermore, a visit brings alive and fleshes out information studied in the classroom.

**A special experience** A field trip to your park is a special experience for students and teachers. It is important to recognize both.

- **For Students:** Children prepare for the field trip weeks in advance. Permission slips must be signed, lunches planned, clothing decided upon. Time is spent in the classroom discussing the visit, what they will see and do, and what kind of things they will learn about. It is little wonder that children get off their buses excited, talkative, and full of energy.
- **For Teachers:** Anyone who has ever been a teacher knows that a field trip is not the easiest type of activity to organize and carry out. Teachers lead field trips because they have certain learning goals in mind for both the students and themselves. Most teachers look forward to the field trip as eagerly as their students.